

The prologe of the Marchantes Tale

WEDDING and waylyng,
care and oother sorwe
I knowe ynogh, on
even and a morwe,
Quod the Marchant,
and so doon othere mo
That wedded been, I
trowe that it be so;
for wel I woot, it fareth
so with me.

I have a wyf, the worste that may be;
for thogh the feend to hire ycoupled were,
She wolde hym overmacche, I dar wel swere.
What sholde I yow reherce in special
hir hye malice? She is a shrewe at al.
Ther is a long and large difference
Bitwix Grisildis grete patience
And of my wyf the passyng crueltee.
Were I unbounden, al so moot I thee!

I wolde nevere eft comen in the snare.
We wedded men lyve in sorwe and care.
Assaye whoso wole, and he shal fynde
I seye sooth, by Seint Thomas of Ynde,
As for the moore part, I sey nat alle;
God shilde that it sholde so bifalle!
A! good sir Hoost! I have ywedded bee
Thise monthes two, and moore nat, pardee!
And yet, I trowe, he that al his lyve
Wyfles hath been, thogh that men wolde
him ryve
Unto the herte, ne koude in no manere
Tellen so muchel sorwe, as I now heere
Koude tellen of my wyves cursednesse!
Now, quod our Hoost, Marchant, so God
yow blesse!
Syn ye so muchel knowen of that art,
ful hertely I pray yow telle us part.
Gladly, quod he, but of myn owene soore,
for soory herte, I telle may namoore.

HEERE BIGYNNETH THE MARCHANTES TALE

WHAT in this world it is a paradys,
Thus seyde this olde knyght, that was so
wys.
AND certainly, as sooth as God is kyng,
To take a wyf, it is a glorious thyng;
And namely whan a man is oold and
hoor,
Channe is a wyf the fruyt of his tresor.
Channe sholde he take a yong wyf and a feir,
On which he myghte engendren hym an heir,
And lede his lyf in joye and in solas;
Wheras thise bacheleres synge Alas!
Whan that they fynden any adversitee
In love, which nys but chyllyssh vanytee.
And trewely it sit wel to be so,
That bacheleres have often peyne and wo;
On brotel ground they buylde, & brotelnesse
They fynde, whan they wene sikernesse.
They lyve but as a bryd or as a beest,
In libertee, and under noon arreest,
Theras a wedded man in his estaat
Lyveth a lyf blisful and ordinaat,
Under the yok of mariage ybounde.
Wel may his herte in joye & blisse habounde;
for who kan be so buxom as a wyf?
Who is so trewe, and eek so ententyf
To kepe hym, syk and hool, as is his make?
for wele or wo she wole hym nat forsake.
She nys nat wery hym to love and serve,
Thogh that he lye bedrede til he sterve.

AND yet somme clerkes seyn it nys
nat so,
Of whiche he, Theofraste, is oon of
tho.
What force thogh Theofraste liste lye?
Ne take no wyf, quod he, for housbond-
rye,
As for to spare in houshold thy dispence;
A trewe servant dooth moore diligence
Thy good to kepe, than thyn owene wyf.

Noon oother lyf, seyde he, is worth a bene;
for wedlok is so esy and so clene.

That in this world it is a paradys,
Thus seyde this olde knyght, that was so
wys.
AND certainly, as sooth as God is kyng,
To take a wyf, it is a glorious thyng;
And namely whan a man is oold and
hoor,
Channe is a wyf the fruyt of his tresor.
Channe sholde he take a yong wyf and a feir,
On which he myghte engendren hym an heir,
And lede his lyf in joye and in solas;
Wheras thise bacheleres synge Alas!
Whan that they fynden any adversitee
In love, which nys but chyllyssh vanytee.
And trewely it sit wel to be so,
That bacheleres have often peyne and wo;
On brotel ground they buylde, & brotelnesse
They fynde, whan they wene sikernesse.
They lyve but as a bryd or as a beest,
In libertee, and under noon arreest,
Theras a wedded man in his estaat
Lyveth a lyf blisful and ordinaat,
Under the yok of mariage ybounde.
Wel may his herte in joye & blisse habounde;
for who kan be so buxom as a wyf?
Who is so trewe, and eek so ententyf
To kepe hym, syk and hool, as is his make?
for wele or wo she wole hym nat forsake.
She nys nat wery hym to love and serve,
Thogh that he lye bedrede til he sterve.

AND yet somme clerkes seyn it nys
nat so,
Of whiche he, Theofraste, is oon of
tho.
What force thogh Theofraste liste lye?
Ne take no wyf, quod he, for housbond-
rye,
As for to spare in houshold thy dispence;
A trewe servant dooth moore diligence
Thy good to kepe, than thyn owene wyf.

for she wol clayme half part al hir lyf;
And if that thou be syk, so God me save!
Thy verray freendes or a trewe knave
Wol kepe thee bet than she that waiteth ay
After thy good, and hath doon many a day.
And if thou take a wyf unto thyn hold,
ful lightly maystow been a cokewold.
This sentence, and an hundred thynges worse,
Writeth this man, ther God his bones corse!
But take no kepe of al swich vanytee;
Dedite Theofraste and herke me.
A wyf is Goddes yifte verraily;
Alle othere manere yiftes hardily,
As londes, rentes, pasture, or commune,
Or moebles, alle been yiftes of fortune,
That passen as a shadwe upon a wal,
But dreddeles, if pleynty speke I shal,
A wyf wol laste, and in thyn hous endure,
Wel lenger than thee list, paraventure.

MARRIAGE is a ful greet sacrament;
he which that hath no wyf, I holde hym
shent;
he lyveth helples and al desolat,
Ispeke of folk in secular estat.
And herke why, I sey nat this for noght,
That womman is for mannes help ywroght.
The hye God, whan he hadde Adam made,
And saugh him al alone, belynaked,
God of his grete goodnesse seyde than,
Lat us now make an help unto this man
Lyk to hymself; and thanne he made him Eve.
Heere may ye se, and heerby may ye preve,
That wyf is mannes help and his confort,
his Paradys terrestre and his disport;
So buxom and so vertuous is she,
They moste nedes lyve in unitee.
O flessh they been, and o flessh, as I gesse,
hath but oon herte, in wele and in distresse.

WYF! al Seinte Marie, benedicite!
How myghte a man han any adversitee
That hath a wyf? Certes, I kan nat seye.
The blisse which that is bitwixe hem tweye
Ther may no tonge telle, or herte thynke.
If he be powe, she helpeth hym to swynke;
She kepeth his good, and wasteth never a deel;
Al that hire housbonde lust, hire liketh weel;
She seith not ones, Nay, whan he seith, Ye.

Do this, seith he, Al redy, sire, seith she.
BLISFUL ordre of wedlok precious,
Thou art so murye, and eek so vertuous,
And so commended and appreveed eek,
That every man that halt hym worth a leek
Upon his bare knees oughte al his lyf
Thanke his God that hym hath sent a wyf;
Or elles preye to God hym for to sende
A wyf, to laste unto his lyves ende;
for thanne his lyf is set in sikernesse;
he may nat be deceived, as I gesse,
So that he werke after his wyves reed;
Channe may he boldely kepen up his heed,
They been so trewe, and therwithal so wyse;
for which, if thou wolt werken as the wyse,
Do alwey so as wommen wol thee rede.

O, how that Jacob, as thise clerkes rede,
By good conseil of his mooder Rebekke,
Boonde the hydes skyn aboute his nekke;
Thurgh which his fadres benysoun he wan.

JUDITH, as the storie telle kan,
By wys conseil she Goddes peple kepte,
And slow hym, Oloferus, whil he slepte.
ABIGAYL, by good conseil how she
Saved hir housbonde, Nabal, whan that he
Sholde han be slayn; & looke, Ester also
By good conseil delyvered out of wo
The peple of God, and made hym, Mardochee,
Of Assuere enhauced for to be.

HER nys nothyng in gree superlatyf,
As seith Senek, above an humble wyf.
Suffre thy wyves tonge, as Catoun bit;
She shal comande, and thou shalt suffren it;
And yet she wole obeie of curteisye.
A wyf is kepere of thyn housbondrye;
Wel may the sike man biwaille and wepe,
Theras ther nys no wyf the hous to kepe.
I warne thee, if wisely thou wolt wirche,
Love wel thy wyf, as Crist loveth his churche.
If thou lovest thyself, thou lovest thy wyf,
No man hateth his flessh, but in his lyf
he fostreth it, and therfore bidde I thee,
Cherisse thy wyf, or thou shalt nevere thee.
Housbonde and wyf, whatso men jape or pleye,
Of worldly folk holden the siker weye;
They been so knyht, ther may noon harm bityde;
And namely, upon the wyves syde,
for which this Januarie, of whom I tolde,
Considered hath, inwith his dayes olde,
The lusty lyf, the vertuous quyete,
That is in mariage hony sweete;
And for his freendes on a day he sente,
To tellen hem theeffect of his entente.

His face sad, his tale he hath hem
toold:
He seyde, freendes, I am hoor and
oold,
And almoost, God woot, on my
pittes brynke;

Upon my soule somewhat moste I thynke,
I have my body folily despended;
Blessed be God! that it shal been amended!
for I wol be, certeyn, a wedded man,
And that anon in al the haste I kan,
Unto som mayde fair and tendre of age.
I prey yow, shapeth for my mariage
Al so deynly, for I wol nat abyde;
And I wol fonde tespien, on my syde,
To whom I may be wedded hastily.
But forasmuche as ye been mo than I,
Ye shullen rather swich a thyng espyen
Than I, and where me best were to allyen.
But o thyng warne I yow, my freendes deere,
I wol noon oold wyf han in no manere.
She shal nat passe twenty yeer, certayn;
Oold flassh and yong flessh wolde I have ful fayn.
Bet is, quod he, a pyk than a pykerel;
And bet than old boef is the tendre veel.
I wol no womman thritty yeer of age,

The
Marchantes
Tale